squealed. "There's Mr. Stockton! Look, Mamma—look, Carrie."

"What a delightful surprise!" said Mrs. Ransom. "I'm so glad you got home in time for the dance, Mr. Stockton. We hear wonderful things of the play—it's quite taken Chicago by storm, hasn't it?"

HE mumbled. Mrs. Ransom overwhelmed him. He was awfully afraid of her. She was an extremely good-looking woman who saw no reason why her dressmaker and the other accessories to her appearance in public should pay any heed to her years. She was as fair as her blonde daughter—the one called Ruth—and as smart as either of them. As for them, you might see a hundred of them both along Fifth Avenue any winter afternoon. They were just conventionally pretty girls, turned out of the mold of finishing school and theatres and country clubs and summer resorts. It happened that that winter they were being mildly artistic, but Stockton didn't understand such things. He only knew that they bored him to extinction, and that he was always, for mysterious reasons, dining with them, or sitting in a box next to one of them at the theatre, or balancing a teacup at their house.

"Do stay and help us, Mr. Stockton!" Mrs. Ransom begged. "We have to meet my poor little niece—she's come all the way from California alone, to stay with us. The poor child is probably frightened to death—and it's so hard to meet people when you don't know what they look like."

"Now, Stockton had a memory like some bureau drawers. It held all sorts of things. Sometimes you can put your hand into one of those frightfully messy drawers and bring out the very thing you want; sometimes you can search for an hour, for something you know is there, and empty the drawer out on the floor twice over and still not find it. This time——

"Oh—I know your niece!" said Stockton, never noticing the mingling of amazement and indignation with which his statement was received. He turned around. "Here she comes now!" he said triumphantly. "Awfully charming girl—you'll like her."

He beamed as the young woman who had rescued his second act came through the gate.

"Here are your people," he said. He waved his hand toward Mrs. Ransom and her daughters. "Odd, my knowing them, isn't it? Well—I've got to hurry along. Lots of things to do—lots. I'll see you again, of course."

He might have been able to interpret Mrs. Ransom's reserved greeting of her niece. And he might not. The thing that preoccupied him was his chance to get away. He seized it and departed.

He decided, fifteen minutes later, that he had never before appreciated the comfort of his rooms. They were excellent rooms, in which you could scarcely hear the elevated at all, unless you made a point of listening. When he gave a tea, as he had, once or twice, been chivied into doing by female relatives, strong women broke down and wept at the contemplation of his misery. But he liked them. They were his rooms; he was used to them. He knew all about the tricks of his Morris chair; it wasn't the chair's fault if people who didn't understand its workings sat down abruptly and landed on the floor. As for the wall-paper, the things his Aunt Jane had said had been entirely called for. They had been willing to repaper the place the last time he had renewed his lease, but he had refused to have it done.

He bathed in comfort for the first time since Frobert had lured him into the stark luxury of Midwestern hotels; later, in a dressing-gown he had long held in esteem, but which a false shame had prevented him from taking on his trip, he went back to the new play. He liked this new play better all the time; it was growing under his hand like a living thing. Curious pains afflicted him about 8 o'clock that night; he decided, in some surprise, after considering them for a time, that they might be connected with the fact that he hadn't eaten anything since his early breakfast on the train.

SOME TIME the next morning, when he was dictating to his stenographer the description of his heroine, he stopped and frowned. He remembered, suddenly, and with a good deal of annoyance, what it was he had wanted to ask the girl on the train. Her name, of course! He might need to see her again. She was, in a sense, his collaborator. Then he brightened. Of course! She was Mrs. Ransom's niece.

"Oh, damn it!" he said explosively. His stenographer who had done his

A GIRL MORE FASCINATING THAN ANY HE EVER KNEW DANCED INTO THE ACTION.

work for some years, smiled tolerantly.

He could re-establish relations with the girl of the train through the Ransoms. But that involved going there. Specifically, it seemed to involve keeping his promise about the dance that night. He had had some vague idea of getting rid of the Ransoms by methods he had previously found serviceable. If your conduct was sufficiently outrageous, he had found, people dropped you, sooner or later. Promising to go to this masquerade, and then staying away, without offering any excuse, had struck him as being likely to achieve this end. Well—another time.

"What can I wear to a costume dance, Miss Burke?" he asked his stenographer.

"A domino," she said at once, knowing the man. "You wouldn't take the trouble to wear anything else. I'll telephone and have one sent around. Where's the dance?"

"Oh, up at that place where all the artists live, near Central Park," he said. "Big studios, you know—balconies, easels—all that sort of thing"——

He waved his hands.

"I'll arrange about a taxi as I go out," said Miss Burke cheerfully. "About 9 o'clock?"

"I suppose so," he said. "Rotten thing to have to do. Where were we?"

BY 9 o'clock, as a matter of fact, Stockton was quite resigned to going to the dance. He had done a thundering good day's work; he was healthily tired; he had had a remarkably good dinner, spiced by the conversation of two or three chaps he had run across at the club. He was in an expansive mood; he was disposed to think life and the world had merit. It was true that he never had enjoyed a function like this dance, but after all, people did enjoy them, and this might be the night for him to find the key and unlock the gates of a new realm of pleasure. Besides, there was something he wanted to ask that girl; he wanted to be sure about the way Helen, in his play, was to establish a telephone connection with the benighted idiot of a hero without letting him know she was responsible.

Mrs. Ransom and her daughters were taking no chances. They were waiting for him when he was announced. Being announced, in the confusion of arriving Pierrots and Theda Baras in the lobby, was no simple matter.

"Mrs. Ransom says they'll be right down," he was told, and they were.

"So glad to see you!" said Mrs. Ransom—who was Semiramis, or some such lady, for the evening. The blonde Ruth was attired as a Dutch girl; her brunette sister was a Columbine." It was remarkable, Stockton reflected, the way those girls ran to form! He scowled. Who was the niece?

He had been led to the floor, and to the box Mrs. Ransom had taken, before he managed to ask the question.

"My niece?" said Mrs. Ransom, looking puzzled. "Oh, Margaret! Why, she's staying upstairs. Of course—the poor child—no costume. And after all—it wouldn't be very suitable. It's very sad"——

Stockton agreed with the last remark, at least. It was sad. But he was hugely mystified. Why was it sad? They talked about the girl as if she were deformed or something. He wondered if she had bow legs or knock knees. But then he looked around and saw that there were ladies there whose skirts reached their ankles. Some ladies——

He danced unhappily, once with Ruth, once with Carrie. Then he danced with a stray young woman to whom Mrs. Ransom introduced him—by way of showing, perhaps, that she wasn't afraid of having him leave the reservation. Her judgment was good. The girl made him long for Ruth or Carrie, or even for both. He realized that it was a dreadful thing to feel so about any woman, but he couldn't help it.

He never knew just how he managed it. But somehow he got out into the lobby. He slipped into an elevator. He got out at the fifth floor. He rang the bell of Mrs. Ransom's luxurious studio apartment—it has been mentioned, hasn't it, that Carrie and Ruth were by way of being artistic that winter?

If a maid had answered his ring, he wouldn't have known what to do. He would probably have asked for Mrs. Ransom, and been sent downstairs to find her. However, no maid came. No one came. The silence of the grave rewarded even his second touching of the bell. Instinctively he tried the handle of the door. It turned, and the door opened. He went in, rather scared, and on to the great living room with its huge studio windows.

The room was very dark; the only light came from a heavily shaded floor lamp in one corner. But there was a sound, a sound of muffled sobbing. Stockton was appalled. He trembled as he saw a girl, his girl of the train, thrown upon a couch, her shoulders shaking pitifully.

"Oh, Lord!" he said to himself. "Oh, my Lord!"

She hadn't heard him—hadn't heard the bell, either, obviously. Her grief was too violent. He didn't know what to do. Back out? It was the sensible thing. But he couldn't. He was too profoundly touched, too sorry for her. He could see it all. What a beast Mrs. Ransom was! Something drew him across the room, over to that pathetic figure on the couch.

"Miss—Miss Margaret"—— he said.

"G-go away"—— she begged in a muffled voice, still shaking.

He leaned over and laid his hand gently on her shoulder.

"Please"—— he said. "Look up—speak to me—don't cry so—it's all right."

She sat up abruptly.

"C-c-cry!" she gasped. "I'm not c-crying—I'm l-laughing! I'm h-having h-hys-hysterics! I never knew anything so fu-fu-funny in all my life!"

He drew back, aghast. And he shook his head. Well, he'd never gone around saying he understood women, anyway. He knew he didn't. He stared at her, and she shrieked, and hid her face once more. But after a moment she pulled herself together a little.

"I'm sorry!" she said. "But you don't know—you don't know! Mr. Stockton—oh, I've got to tell you! I've got to tell some one, or I'll burst. If you hadn't come I'd have gone out and told a policeman!"

Stockton remembered that all the best authorities agreed that you had to humor them.

"You see—I'm Cinderella!" she said. "I'm left here at home while they all go to the ball!"

"I know!" he said indignantly. "That's why I came. It's a damned shame!"

Once more gales of laughter swept her. But in a moment she grew sober.

"You're a dear," she said. "I'm just as grateful as if—— Oh, sit down and listen, Mr. Stockton! You've got to hear it!"

He sat down, vastly bewildered, but beginning to perceive that grief played no part in this young woman's hysterical condition. After all, the man did write plays; he wasn't entirely blind.

"You see, I told you on the train, I was coming to visit my aunt and my cousins," she said. "Well—you know them! I didn't! I hadn't seen them since I was six. They never liked my mother after she married Dad. And they didn't like him because he was a visionary darling who couldn't make money. They thought men who didn't make more money each year than they had the year before weren't respectable. So after we went out to California to live they all dropped us. Mrs. Ransom is mother's sister.

"My mother died when I was ten, and after that I just lived all around with Dad. We went to Japan once—he was going to make a fortune out there. But